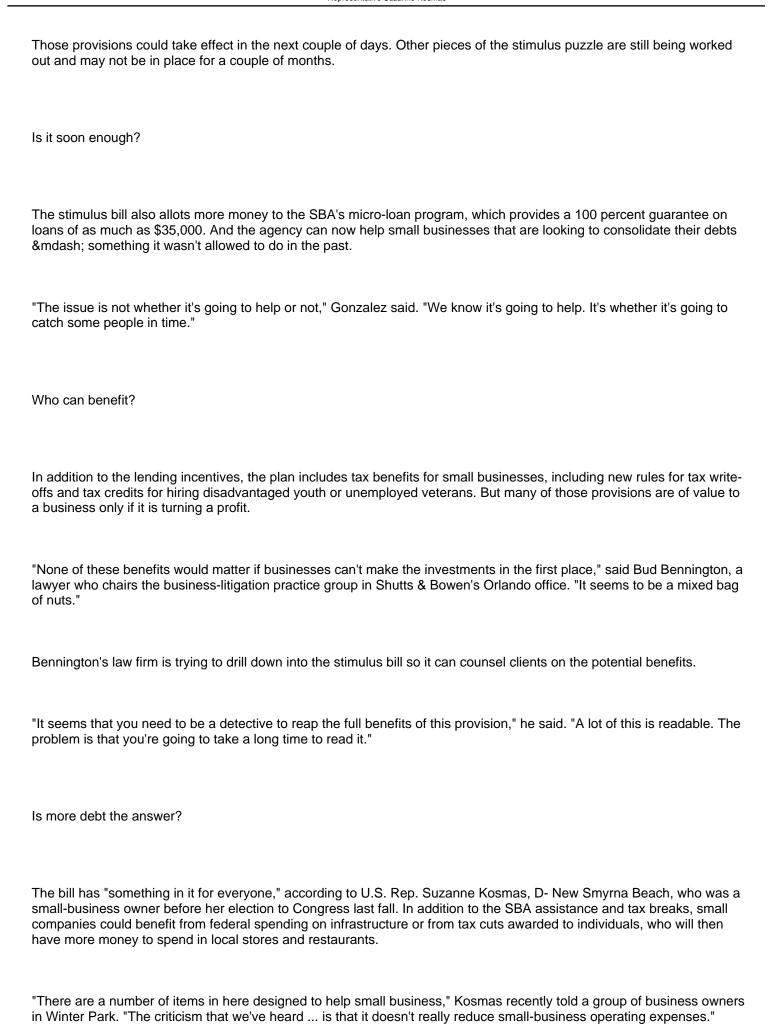
Small-business stimulus: Something for everyone, eventually Orlando Sentinel Sara K. Clarke March 4, 2009 What's in the federal stimulus bill for small businesses? Quite a bit. While experts are still wading through the massive bill passed last month by Congress, a couple of things are becoming clear: Small businesses haven't been forgotten, and the U.S. Small Business Administration will be a major vehicle for helping them. "There's a focus on small business in the stimulus plan, and the SBA is getting a lot of benefits from this," said Geof Longstaff, chairman of Mercantile Commercial Capital, an Altamonte Springs-based lender that has established a stimulus-response team to decipher the legislation. "It will be cheaper for small businesses to apply for loans, and there will be fewer SBA fees." The SBA is being careful about raising expectations. The North Florida regional office, which represents the Orlando area, is already getting calls from people looking for stimulus help. What's for certain? Two things are definite, district Director Wilfredo Gonzalez said: Application fees for loans have been slashed, saving the average business owner about \$2,000 on a \$100,000 loan. And the agency will now be able to guarantee as much as 90

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By cutting the repayment risk for banks that loan to small businesses, the plan is supposed to encourage lending, though

percent of a small-business loan, compared with 75 percent to 85 percent in the past.

the response from banks could differ from region to region, Gonzalez said.



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Kosmas said results of the stimulus bill should "hit the street" soon, but some local business owners aren't as optimistic.

Rob Goderis, an Orlando-based custom-home builder, said he doesn't think more debt is the answer for companies trying to keep their head above water. And he's afraid government bureaucracy will keep the money from getting to Main Street businesses, especially those with only a handful of workers.

"I just see too much government involved in the management of this money," he said. "I'm not very optimistic about that money ever getting into the hands of small business."

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